



Moments of Devotion



1923

by Bruce S. Wright

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By
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“The path of the just is as the shining light,
that shineth more and more.”—*Proverbs 4. 18.*



MOMENTS OF DEVOTION

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."—*Psalm 119. 11.*

I once saw the following outline of this verse:—

1. The best Book in the world—*Thy Word.*
2. The best place to put it—*Hid in mine heart.*
3. The best purpose for which to put it there—*That I might not sin against thee.*

John Ruskin wrote: "All that I have written, every greatness that there has been in any thought of mine, whatever has been done in my life, has been simply due to the fact that when I was a child my mother daily read with me a part of the Bible and *daily made me learn a part of it by heart.*"

On the cover of the Bible owned by one of the stanchest Christian men the world has known were stamped in gold letters these two lines:

*"This Book will keep you from sin, or
Sin will keep you from this Book."*

Thy Word, O God, is a lamp and a light. How often have we stumbled in darkness because we neglected to walk according to the light. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." Forgive us for temporizing life by giving ourselves to this and to that, when thy Word is eternal. Help us that daily thy Book may be not only upon our tables, but in our hearts. May thy Word be hid *within*, that *outwardly* we may be strong.

"Year by year continually."—*Hebrews 10. 1.*

So this is the record of life, year by year, year by year. Human history dates back about six thousand years. Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Israel, Greece, Rome, Medieval and Modern history, here is the record, year by year. How long have you lived in your present home—five, ten, fifteen years? Whether the years be many or few, this is their story, year by year. So the seasons pass, spring, summer, autumn, winter, year by year. How monotonous it all is! What is your work? Are you a teacher, soldier, homemaker, clerk, business man, machinist? Whatever you do, time stretches on year by year. "One more year, two more years, three more years, and I expect to do so and so," you tell me. Yes, and then what are you going to do? One more year, two more years, a few more years, and then the grave. Is this all that life means? Can there possibly be anything more humdrum than life if this is the only measure we can find, year by year? Does life mean nothing more than tearing off the months of the calendar? If that is all then human life is the emptiest thing imaginable. Ah, but life is more. Year by year the Son of God stands to rescue life from its humdrum and monotony, to save men from their sins, and to make the days radiant with service and the year glorious with meaning.

O Lord, our Lord, save us from the monotony of time. Year by year, day by day may thy Spirit stir us to high thinking, clean living, and purposeful service. May time be conquered in the delight we find in doing thy righteous will. Help us to choose—"Forenoon and afternoon and night; forenoon and afternoon and night: forenoon—and what? The empty song repeats itself. No more? Yes, and this is life; make this forenoon sublime, this afternoon a psalm, this night a prayer, and time is conquered, and thy crown is won."

"And underneath are the everlasting arms."—*Deuteronomy 33. 27.*

At once we think of a mother's arms. We speak of the Fatherhood of God; may we not, with equal truth, speak of God's Mother arms; "My mother's loving instinct was from God," wrote Horace Bushnell, "and God was in her love to me first, therefore; which love was deeper than hers and more protracted. Long years ago she vanished, but God stays by me still, embracing me in my gray hairs as tenderly and carefully as she did in my infancy, and giving to me as my joy and the principal glory of my life, that he lets me know him, and helps me, with real confidence, to call him Father." In infancy other arms upheld us, for we were helpless. In maturity we become overconfident, though we need no less the upholding arms. We imagine that physical strength is everything, until the crisis comes, then we feel the need of sustaining spiritual arms. Real, though unseen; strong, though without substance; ever present, though we cannot put the hand upon them; underneath us, though we wander afar; ever ready to receive us when repentant, to give us confidence in the conflict, to lead us along the lonely way, to help us over hard places, never failing us when we fall—such are the Father's everlasting arms.

O my soul, trust thou in God, for he is thy sure refuge. In temptation turn to him. In thy trial he will cause thee to triumph. For thine affliction thou wilt find him adequate. In thy prosperity he will keep thee from being puffed up. He will see thee through thy sorrow. In everything trust the everlasting arms.

"For so he giveth his beloved sleep."—*Psalm*
127. 2.

One hour out of every three, eight out of every twenty-four, four months out of every year, and twenty-three years out of a lifetime of threescore years and ten is the amount of time given to sleep. Is it satisfactory to say that the only purpose of sleep is to give rest and repair the waste tissues? Sancho Panza, the little Spanish peasant who acted as squire to Don Quixote, said of sleep: "Now, blessings light on him that first invented this same sleep! It covers a man all over, thoughts and all, like a cloak; it is meat for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, heat for the cold, and cold for the hot." Sleep does all this, but it also has a higher purpose. Sleep is a complete separation from the world of strife and sin. It is suggestive of the higher life. Grown weary of the daily struggle and grind, God leads you apart to remind you, in solitude, that life is more than meat and drink. In stillness you are made to hear his voice. In repose you enter into possession of your own soul. In sleep "his beloved win their best gifts and build their stateliest walls; it is there that they see visions and dream dreams." To sleep is to purify life, to refine it and get rid of its dross. To awake from such sleep is to face the world as a conqueror and let Christ dominate in character.

Father of all mercies, we thank thee for the gift of sleep. In both the lower and higher sense sleep is a haven indeed. By sleep thou dost refresh the body, restore the mind, calm the soul, and assure thy peace. Help us, by the strength and vision therein found, to live for thee every waking hour.

"He is faithful that promised."—*Hebrews 10. 23.*

Here two precious words are joined—promise and faithfulness. It is easy to make a promise, but always to keep a promise when made, that is character. The wound of a broken promise is deep and slow healing. This should ever be in the mind of the parent or older person when making a promise to a child. It is told of David Livingstone that once he promised to send some curiosities from Africa to a little boy in England, and had forgotten to do so. The boy's father was writing to Livingstone, and the little fellow added a postscript, reminding his friend of his promise. The great explorer was overwhelmed with dismay and confusion when he read the postscript. He hastened to repair the wrong he had done, and refers to the matter again and again, with evident pain, feeling sure, he says, that the boy would forgive him if he knew how much he had suffered by his fault. It is evidence indisputable of the greatness and nobility of Livingstone's character that his grief over a forgotten promise made to a little boy was so poignant. Listen—he is faithful that promised. Oh, doubting one, halting soul, fearful child, trust the promises God has made for he will not fail.

Heavenly Father, forgive me my lavishness in making promises and my laxity in keeping them. Make my conscience true to guard the covenant I have entered into. Help me walk with patient feet the pathway I have chosen. May the power of thy unalterable word change my clayey character and glorify it with the beauty of constancy.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life."—*John 14. 6.*

Personality is the striking thing about this statement. We declare our doctrines, boast our charters and take pride in our constitutions, which is well. But how vain are these things until they are interpreted by individuals and made potent through personality. Supreme truth centers in a person. The apostle, in his declaration of faith, used the word whom, not what. "I know whom I have believed." Canon Liddon wrote: "Plato is not Platonism; Platonism might have been taught though its author had never lived. Mohammed is not Islam; the Koran itself would warn us against any such confusion between the teacher of its doctrine and the substance of the doctrine itself. But Christ himself is Christianity. His teaching is inextricably bound up with his person; and it is not merely because he taught what he did, but because he is what he is, that through him we can come to the Father." What a revelation is this! It is not, "I teach the way; I declare the truth; I point to the life eternal." No. It is, "I am the way, the truth and the life." They who have Christ walk in the way. They who know him have knowledge of the truth. They who love him have life. It is the power of his personality blended intimately with our personality, in the present tense, "I am."

We thank thee, heavenly Father, for a peopled highway, for the warm heartbeat of truth, and for thy message of love that comes to us along the throbbing routes of life. As we draw near to Easter reveal thyself anew to us, O Saviour, as our way, our truth, and our life.

"Then were there brought unto him little children."—*Matthew 19. 13.*

The children were brought to Jesus. They belong to him, but they must be brought. "Of such is the kingdom." Yes, but who is to enroll their names? Whose is the chiefest responsibility? One evening at a public dinner I sat next to a leading Christian layman. He grew reminiscent. He told me something of his boyhood. He said his mother would put her children to bed, hear their prayers, then go into an adjoining room alone. One day the boy asked, "Mother, where have you been?" "Wrestling with the Lord for you children," was her answer. There is something Puritanical in the sound of that phrase, "wrestling with the Lord." Also there is something wonderfully purifying in the act. Some one hundred and fifty Christians were asked the question, "What was the most potent influence in shaping your character?" Fifty-two answered their parents and home influence. Forty-eight cited other personal examples. Twenty-nine replied books and writers. Twenty-eight said church and pastors. The pastor can do much, the Sunday school teacher can do much; but power rests with the parents.

O Christ, lover of children, forgive our neglect. Thou wilt receive the children if only we bring them. Help us, patiently, tactfully, with loving-kindness to bring them to thee. Fulfill thy promise, O Lord; may our children and our children's children love thy law.

"Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance," etc.—*Matthew 6. 16-18.*

Christ did not condemn fasting. He commended it by practicing it. But his face was hard set against a hypocritical purpose in fasting. Not that we may be seen of men, but that we may more clearly see spiritual truth should we fast. One season is as good as another, yet we sow the seed in the springtime and gather in the fruits in the harvest season. The Lenten season, which draws near, is no better than another, except that it may be the springtime of the soul. Because of the events in our Lord's life at this time of the year opportunity is given us to think upon those events, to draw near to him, to strengthen our faith and bulwark anew our character. Fasting, in itself, is good for the body. Fasting, with a high and holy motive, is good for the mind and soul. Fasting should have a revival among Christians everywhere. All the year through emphasis is placed upon feasting, feasting. If it were socially proper I would give an invitation to all my friends, not to a feast but to a fast. That which it would be indelicate for me to do the Lenten season boldly trumpets.

O Lord, who for our sakes didst fast forty days and forty nights, give us grace that, by every method possible, we may rise above the sensual to dwell in the spiritual. Forgive us our crassness of life. Upon the things that are coarse may we turn our back. To the merely selfish invitation may we, these days, say, No. To the call of the Spirit help us to say, in his name, Yes.

"And Peter followed afar off."—*Luke 22. 54.*

Afar off! This it was that led to the tragedy in Peter's life. Distance results, sooner or later, in denial. Had Peter kept close to Christ he would not have been cowed by an onlooking maid nor shriveled by blasphemous men. "I never knew him," said the man who but a short time before had sworn undying allegiance to Christ. Most spiritual tragedies and moral denials are the result of distance. We begin with such high resolves to be loyal to Christ; in the first glow of our religious experience we cannot imagine any cloud able to darken the brightness of our new-found joy. But something steals in—a too liberal attitude toward evil, a slight neglect of duty, a preference for crass and worldly things, a desire to be numbered with the crowd, an unwillingness to be known as an ardent follower of Christ—by such methods the distance between us and our Saviour is lengthened until the step to desertion is an imperceptible one. Who can help noting that those who deny Christ, unconsciously it may be, but it is denial none the less, are those who follow him afar off, whose religious life is a matter of convenience rather than conviction! Afar off! Note this terrible alliteration—distance, denial, desertion, depression, deceit, devilishness, darkness, despair.

Saviour, forgive me my slow-moving steps, my lack of enthusiasm, my half-hearted service, my silent denials, my compromising attitudes, my cowardly desertions. I lift my eyes and I must strain them to see thee, for I am so far off I can scarcely discern thee. I hasten forward, to shorten the space between, that distance may not lead to desertion nor faltering steps to traitorous deeds.

"That they all may be one."—*John 17. 21.*

How essentially we are one if we will only admit it! Think of these hymns we sing. Here is one written by a Methodist, while next to it is one written by a Baptist, and beneath it is one penned by a Quaker, and following him a Catholic voices his praise. And in the hour of the heart's need no one stops to ask, "Who's Who" among the authors. We seize upon the strain of the one who best responds to the experience within. Lyman Abbott, whose aged hand still wields a virile pen, writes about the "Dissolution of Dogma." "The dissolution of dogma," says he, "is not the dissolution of Christianity. The alabaster box is broken and the fragrance of the contents pervades the whole house." James Denney, who went down on a torpedoed boat, whose gifted mind and loving heart the world could ill spare, gave a tentative creed for Christendom. Here it is: "I believe in God through Jesus Christ his only Son, out Lord and Saviour." What more do we need than this?

"For Christ is more than all the creeds,
And his full life of gentle deeds
Shall all the creeds survive.
Not what I do believe, but whom."

For Christ is love. Love blinds the eyes to the trivial things which divide us. Love opens the eyes to behold the one fold and the one Shepherd.

Our Master, thou who didst sanctify thyself for our sakes, dwell richly in us, that we may share the breadth of vision and the inclusive love which marked thy contact with men. Help us, "what'er our name or sign," that we may "own thy sway, hear thy call, and test our lives by thine."

"If any man will do his will, he shall know."—*John 7. 17.*

Who could ask a fairer test? Is there any other test worth the name? And how simple it is—do and you shall know. Disobedience breeds doubt. Obedience begets overcoming faith. We claim that we are eager for certain knowledge of God. Then why not earnestly set to work to do his will? "Doing and knowing," wrote Maltbie Babcock, "are blood relations. Experiment and experience spring from the same root, and will not grow apart. Do you wish you had a Christian's experience? Will to make the Christian experiment. Would you know who Christ is, and what he can do for you? Obey him; do as he directs. Do not expect experience without experiment." How often do we hear men say that when they know they will do. Jesus puts it just the other way; he tells men that when they do they will know. Christ does not reveal himself to the dreamer or the debater, but to the doer. If one would know the divineness of Christ's doctrine his life must be definitely set toward righteousness. Christ bids us, this Lenten season, accept his test and prove his doctrine. He gives certain faith in exchange for a consecrated will; a mind at rest for a life of deeds; a sunset of peace for a day spent in his service; a sure eternity for a short span of loyalty.

O Christ of the Easter triumph, we turn to thee. We would be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Help us to use our will that we may know the way. May obedience be the guide that shall lead us in the way everlasting.

"As it began to dawn."—*Matthew 28. 1.*

Was it literary chance or divine intent that led the writer of the first Gospel thus to refer to the first Easter? Here is poetry, certainly; here is inspiration as well. Christianity is a *dawning*; it always has been, it ever will be. In the beginning light dawned through God's word. The physical dawn with which God blesses every day is here matched by a spiritual dawn that fails not. Life and light rule wherever men let the risen Christ enter their hearts. The Easter dawning is so glorious that we begin weeks ahead to look for the first shafts of light. Lent is the season of looking toward the dawn—watching, waiting, thinking, believing—that when the resurrection light of Easter day breaks upon the world we may not be o'erwhelmed by its effulgent rays. More subdued, but no less real, the Easter light is with us through all the year. And in that great hour, when we go hence, we simply step triumphantly out into the dawn.

"Dying, they lifted his curly head,
And he looked to the East, and smiling said—
 'It's light on the hills!
And he went away in the morning bright,
With the last sweet quivering word of 'Light'
On the lips death kissed to a silence long."

Our Redeemer and our Lord, who art covered with light as with a garment, help us to attain the brightness of an unfaltering faith. Walking in the blessed light of each day, we would claim the fuller light that is ever beginning but never ending.

"Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve."—*Matthew 26. 20.*

Twelve were at the first Lord's Supper. Unnumbered multitudes keep the feast to-day. Fishermen, and a few others, were at that earliest table. Men from every walk—statesmen, poets, philosophers, soldiers, toilers without number—have gathered about the table since. A few men, largely of one blood, were in that upper room long ago. Men of every blood, of every race, of every color gather in the upper rooms of to-day. How plain the feast—bread and the fruit of the vine. How plain the truth taught—"This is my body broken for you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for many for the remission of sins." But peace was not there. A man with evil plans was in their midst. Others were striving for the places of honor. The sacrament is a holy means. It can have an holy end only when holily used. Watchfulness, prayer, humility, purpose—these are our unfailing guides to lead us to the feast of feasts.

Grant us power, our Saviour, that having partaken of the feast we may not forget its message. Forgive us that so often we come to thy sacrament with worldly thoughts or with the hope that some strange thing may happen. May the simplicity of the supper be its commendation. In simplicity we would remember thee, in sincerity we would serve thee, and in sacrifice we would find our strength.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."—*Psalm 122. 1.*

Why do not more men go to church?

It is the old query. It bobs up every so often. Every generation in all seriousness propounds it.

In like seriousness men give their actually ridiculous answers. If the question is the same the answers are likewise tiresomely identical.

This query was recently answered in the same old fashion by various men whom Robert Gardner McGregor questioned on the subject.

The answers were, as usual, criticisms of the church. All too readily we assume that every objection registered against the church by an irreligious man is a justified indictment of blame against the church, and no blame at all to the man himself.

Mr. McGregor in his public answer rejected any such quiescent attitude, and spoke instead in the following straightout, pungent manner:

"A real reason why many men stay away from church is that the spiritual in them is atrophied. This is just as possible as it is for a man's mind to become atrophied. The spiritual has lost its fine edge, and to regain it a man must pass through the earthquake of some great sorrow; or, like the prodigal, be brought to his senses in the shame of what he is in the light of some vision of what he might be."

O Saviour, lover of truth, deliver me from silliness, shallowness, and pretense. If I hate thy church I will not pretend that I love it by giving empty excuses for staying away.

"His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men."—*Psalm* *II.* 4.

The thought of censorship is not so very new after all, is it? It is not so very new and not so very bad. On the whole I think it is decidedly good. Though the war has been over these many months I am still receiving letters stamped, "Passed by the censor." But there is a higher censorship always in force. "Thou God seest me" is a tremendous aid to self-control. How much better we would feel at the close of the day if we would keep a censor in our brain, upon our tongue, and close by our pen when we write! There would be fewer vain regrets over impure thoughts, hasty words, and unwise letters too late to be recalled. The phrase, "Passed by censor," is not an insult but a compliment. It tells the world that there is nothing within that is unpatriotic, untrue, or harmful. There are those who have such a high reputation for patriotism, truth, and helpfulness that the censor never looks within or starts an inquiry; his stamp of approval is given without question. "Passed by the censor" of love, of sincerity, of chivalry, of generosity, of courtesy, of frankness, of loyalty, of hatred of all sin and allegiance to all righteousness—be this our goal.

Our Lord, we long to lead lives of service. We would be builders up and not tearers down; helpful, not harmful; watchful, not negligent; ever on guard, never asleep at the post; eager, not slothful; deep, not shallow; earnest, not silly. In the mighty struggle for character may we be able to stand sure and true before the censorship of heaven.

"Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa."
—*Amos* I. I.

Amos, a herdman and a holy man; a tender of sheep and a keeper of the flock of Israel. A bishop's hands had never been laid upon his head, yet he was a priest of God. He had no pulpit, yet he was a preacher of righteousness. He had no stated congregation, yet he was pastor of a mighty host. Graduating from no theological school, yet he was a prophet of the infinite God. Rebuked by Amaziah, an accredited member of the priesthood, driven hither and yon by those whose conscience could not withstand his message—who called him to preach, who gave him the authority, who ordained him? He was ordained from above. Hear him as he says, "I was not a prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdman, a gatherer of wild figs; and the Lord came to me as I followed the flock, and said, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." Amos went. Since then millions have gone out, called by the voice divine, in the Master's name to do their work, to live their life, the glorious ministry of the unordained.

Master of men, we thank thee for the summons to service. We praise thee, though we have no pulpit, yet may we preach; though we may not proclaim in public, yet our speech hath power; though a bishop's voice has never said, "Take thou authority," thou hast said, "Go ye, therefore." Thou hast called us to take our place in the only genuine apostolic succession. Help us daily to be true in the service to which thou hast called us, the universal ministry of the unordained.

"Let me alone."—Job 7. 16.

It is utterly impossible. It is not in the order of things that we should be let alone. If the mother should let the babe alone the infant would perish. If the sun should let the ice and water alone the rivers would dry up and our fertile fields would become parched ground. If the soil should let the roots alone there would be no green on the branches, no fragrant blossoms, no fruitful harvests. The hand cannot say to the heart, "Let me alone." The eye cannot say to the ear, "Let me alone." No, we are all "members one of another." The American cannot say to the Britisher, "Let me alone." The Italian cannot say to the Frenchman, "Let me alone." It cannot be done. No nation lives unto itself. In the Old Testament are these words: "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." If at this point God should answer our prayer and let us alone it would mean certain perdition. He gives us conscience, faithful friends, his Word, the pulpit's flaming message—he will not let us alone, for "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Do not let us alone, we pray. If we "take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea" may we find thee there. If we "make our bed in hell" do not let us alone. Awake our conscience and keep it awake that our souls may not enter into the slumber that is the sleep of death. If we are bent upon the pathway of sin throw across it the brightness of thine own presence that we may behold the better way. Though we are joined to our idols do not let us alone; stir us up; arouse us from our lethargy; sever us from the evil thing.

"And Jesus . . . said, Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"—*Luke 17. 17.*

Ten were cleansed; only one returned to give thanks. Is this the proportion of the race that manifests gratitude? It would seem so. The thankful spirit should be as plentiful as the morning dew upon the grass; alas, how dry is the earth of praise unto God! Why this dearth of gratitude? Sin is one reason. One who has yielded himself to disobedience does not turn aside to praise the God whose first requisite is obedience to the laws of life. The desire to praise follows the life-quest of purity. Thoughtlessness blights thankfulness. "They simply do not think" must be the verdict regarding many a life that does not turn aside to praise. Selfishness also. Nine were self-centered; only one had a conscience for the good that had been done him. And pride. "Never since I was a boy have I been under obligation to any human," is the boast of many a strong man. Silly speech! You are under obligation to a thousand lowly ones you have never seen, and of course to the Highest One of all. "The Road of the Loving Heart" was the name the Samoan chiefs gave to the road their grateful labor built for their friend, Robert Louis Stevenson. Shall the untutored teach us? Shall we plunge forward with the nine, or turn aside with the one?

O God, what manner of men are we that we should number ourselves with the beasts of the field! They cannot, but we can and we will give praise. We will walk the road of the Thankful Heart.

"A friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him."—*Luke 11. 6.*

An appeal, but no response. An opportunity to do good knocks at the door, but the door cannot be opened. Our friends are journeying to and fro along the pathway of life; sometimes they pause at our door, for they are needy. What is the response we make to their cry? They need *courage*; are we able to speak the word that shall send them with lifted head and strengthened will on their way? They need *sympathy*; does our life lack the warmth they should feel in this, the winter of their soul? They need *strength*; are we so weak or is our example so inadequate that we cannot help them conquer the temptation which now assails them? They need *love*; is our heart so full of self, are we so narrow that we cannot stretch our life to take them in? They need *Christ*; is our religious experience so nominal, so superficial that we are unable to point them to "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world"?

Saviour, thou incomparable Friend, help us to be friendly. Thou who didst never turn away a needy one, help us that we may strengthen the spirits of men when they turn to us. Thou who didst never refuse to open the door when men came to thee asking courage, sympathy, health, strength, love, help us to keep our storehouse well stocked that we may be able to fling wide the door when the needy soul knocks, saying to him: "Come in, I have *something* to set before you."

"Lest we forget."—*Deuteronomy 4. 23.*

Walter Scott described Old Mortality going through the cemeteries of Scotland, chiseling anew upon the tombstones the names that time had well-nigh obliterated. He explained his zeal for the memory of those who had gone before by saying that he wished to see the heroes of yesterday march side by side with the youth of to-day. As a nation and as individuals we suffer an irreparable loss if we permit ourselves to forget those whose sacrifice made possible the priceless heritage we now enjoy. "Death bringeth good fame," wrote Bacon. But fame is a very empty thing, and altogether useless, if those who come after fail to remember the principles for which, with no thought of fame, their fathers gave their lives. Memorial Day comes once a year, "bidding the distant generations hail," saying, "Do not forget."

O God, help us lest we forget. May we remember thy name, for the remembrance of thy name is the beginning of every holy remembrance. To-day we would think grateful thoughts as we look upon the vast army that passes in review—soldier, sailor, nurse, father, mother, friend, stranger—all who have struggled across the battle-fields of war or have been victorious in the conflicts of peace. Thou, Father, dost not forget; we must not. Help us to keep open our Book of Remembrance.

"Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."—*James 1. 2.*

What is your value as a man or a woman? That can be answered only in the test. We never know the value of a harvest until it has come through the test of the growing season, until it has battled with storms, blights, and insects. Gold is not true gold until it has met the test of the refining fire. Friendship shines in the test. David and Jonathan were friends, for when Saul's anger was unjustly kindled against David, Jonathan sought David and said, "You can count on me, I am your friend." Love is strengthened in the test. I never pray for young people whom I marry, "Lord, deliver them from trials and hardships; make all their pathway a pathway of ease." Such a prayer would be base disloyalty to the highest interests of the home. Patriotism is glorified in the test. I would not say that a man is not patriotic whose patriotism had never been tested. But we can say with greater certainty of tested patriotism—there is a patriot. Religion is proven in the test. A young man said to me, "At home I seldom missed church; I always went; everybody went; but here it is different." At home, in his little country town, he doubtless passed for a loyal worshiper. But in the larger city his loyalty was tested, and it failed in the test.

Lord, thou hast honored us in that thou hast permitted us to dwell in an age when faith is tested to the utmost. Conditions and customs challenge our physical vigor and spiritual habits. With joy we hail the test, for under thy guidance we shall emerge with mental poise, moral balance, and the soul, in every way, triumphant.

"They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."—*Acts 4. 13.*

There are men who are proud to be picked out as Harvard, Yale, or Oxford men. One frequently meets people, and he does not have to be long in their presence, ere he learns that they are from Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, or some other particular section of the country. Men also bear the mark of their task. The physician, business man, mechanic, farmer, soldier, each gives evidence of where he has been and what he has been doing. It is not sectarian or narrow for a minister to be willing to be told that he preaches like a Presbyterian or a Methodist. Long, long ago there was a little group of men of whom it was said, "The people took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." The most hallowed place, of haunting loveliness and surpassing strength, is the place of fellowship with Christ. Where is that place? Anywhere and everywhere. The practice of the presence of Christ is not a matter of place, it is controlled by purpose. Each of us, wherever he goes, may show the purpose of the old man in the Faber poem:

"Always his downcast eye
Was laughing silently,
As if he found some jubilee in thinking;
For his one thought was God,
In that one thought he abode,
Forever in that thought more deeply sinking."

To be lost in thee, O Christ, that men
may gather, from our walk and talk, knowl-
edge of thy life, to this we daily aspire.

"Add . . . knowledge."—2 *Peter* 1. 5.

There are many kinds of addition. Things may be thrown together, or they may be methodically added one to the other. True addition has method to it. Out back of the church are several piles of gravel, sand, cement, lumber, steel. As they are now those piles mean very little—they are just thrown together. They are unsightly. But those several piles are being methodically added one to the other and, ere long, there will rise a useful and attractive building. Christian character is not haphazard. It is not a happening. It is not something that is thrown together. It is a methodical addition. First, there is surrender to Christ. Then, beside this, through long years of yearning, of diligence, of patience, of purpose, of addition, the structure of Christian character rises and, complete at last, it stands

"With all its minarets and towers,
And sculptured marbles fair to see;
With all its airy pinnacles
So white against the cloudless blue;
With all its rich storied panes,
And mellowed sunlight streaming through."

Thou hast put knowledge before me, O Christ. Thou hast made me to know the difference between the good and the bad. Help me to discern between the good and the best. To the knowledge that means power may I add the knowledge that means culture. To the knowledge that means culture may I add the knowledge that means character. Forbid that I should be satisfied with the mediocre. With all my getting, I pray, help me to get thy highest knowledge.

"The Lord was with Joseph, and he was prosperous."—*Genesis 39. 2.*

My father was a rich man. No, he did not live on the Avenue, he was not the head of a vast manufacturing plant, he did not hold the stock of half a dozen railroads, he did not ride about in a coach and four—but he was rich. He was rich in his religious faith. He loved his church, he reveled in his Bible and all good literature, his highest pleasure was to put into practice the principles of his religion. He was rich in his home life. His house was not pretentious, but it was a home. It stood back a bit from the street, there was a lawn in front, vines across the veranda; in the rear were trees and shrubs. Within there were eight rooms furnished with the usual furniture for such a house—plus love, confidence, sacrifice, toil. He was rich in his friendships. Men who knew him said, "We believe in him, he rings true." He was rich in his citizenship. He served his city, his state, and his country. He put confidence into his citizenship, bravery into his ballot, a pure and high motive into his private and public acts. In these days when temperance is sweeping on I recall that his was "one of the voices crying in the wilderness"; he was numbered among the triumphant minority. To-day I glory in the riches my earthly father bequeathed me.

Father in heaven, who holdeth the wealth of the world in thy hands, we thank thee for all the prosperous men from Joseph down to the present day. Dwell thou with us that we may be prosperous. Help us to set our affection upon thee rather than upon things; upon the home rather than the house; upon service rather than salary; upon manhood rather than money. We thank thee for material wealth; help us to spiritualize it by the act of consecration, to increase it by investing it and using it as a sacred trust held by us for the sake of Christ's kingdom.

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John."—*John 1. 6.*

There was a man—made in the image and likeness of God; with brain to think, heart to feel, soul to aspire, will to do. There was a man who loitered. He never did things on time. He went lazily through life. There was no energy to his task. There was a man who frittered. He frittered away his time; he frittered away his talents. There was a man who joked. He joked his way through the world. Men laughed with him, they laughed at him; they thought he was a joke. Lo, here was a man who was sent. He gave the impression of divine urgency. There was a man sent from God. In the fifteenth century the people of Florence besieged San Marco's doors that they might get in to hear Savonarola, who carried the conviction that he was sent from God. The sense of divine ambassadorship is not the property of priests and preachers. It belongs to all who will claim it. The church of my boyhood was built up around the ministry, not of a preacher but of a blacksmith. His picture hangs on the wall of that great church. His memory is honored there to-day. Blacksmith at the forge, farmer in the field, soldier at the front, toiler before the machine, business man at your desk, mother in the home, teacher in the school—you are divinely sent.

Master, we ask forgiveness for our half-hearted service. We have been indifferent, cold of heart, and slow of step. We have taken our religious life too much as a matter of course. We would bestir ourselves. Bestow thou upon us the sense of divine urgency. Help us to walk as in thy sight. May we work with the consciousness of the importance of life and the exceeding preciousness of time. May we so live, through laughter and tears, that men may think of us as sent from God.

"Be still, and know that I am God."—*Psalm 46. 10.*

Most of us are ready to be anything but still. One of the most difficult things to do is just this, to be still. We say to our children, "Can't you be still a minute?" Our very tone of impatience shows that we ourselves have not learned the lesson. Our motto is, "Let us be up and going," rather than, "Let us sit still and be quiet." I have read that one day the poet Southey was telling how his time was occupied. "I study Portuguese while I am shaving, I translate Spanish an hour before breakfast, I read all the forenoon and write all the afternoon; every moment of the day is filled with something." An old Quaker woman was listening, and when he had finished she remarked, "Friend, when does thee do thy thinking?" Malcolm J. McLeod says that the Anglican Church brackets her ministers under three adjectives: high churchmen, low churchmen, broad churchmen. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Benson, remarked that what was needed most was deep churchmen. The tremendous need of the man of this age is depth. He shows himself a man of God who, in the midst of the world's shallowness of thought, is able to commune with his own heart and be still.

Thou whose strength is in quietness, help us to be quiet. Thou who speakest not in the earthquake, nor the fire, nor the wind, but in the still small voice, help us to be still. As Moses waited forty years in the desert, may we be willing to tarry a few moments in quietness. As John found unction in the wilderness, may we be glad, now and then, to be the solitaire. As thou, O Christ, didst find strength in seclusion, may we be resolved to come apart with thee and rest awhile.

"The Lord hath anointed me to preach."—*Isaiah 61. 1.*

This applies to the plowman no less than the priest; to men in general as well as ministers in particular; to children no less than to those of maturer years; to women as well as to men (in the matter of the Lord's work there is no question of suffrage). As the farmer serves, no less than the man who fights at the front, so all people are preachers. To preach, we say, means to stand in the pulpit and *speak*. Yes, but do not pulpits differ? There is the ornate preaching place of the Episcopal Church; the John Knox pulpit, boxlike, of the old Presbyterian Church; the massive pulpit of the modern church; the plain platform faced by the people who follow a free and unelaborated worship. But there are other pulpits, and they too differ. There is the student's pulpit, the business man's pulpit, the public official's pulpit, the private citizen's pulpit, the soldier's pulpit, the housewife's pulpit—whoever pulsates with life preaches from a pulpit. You speak from your pulpit, by your words, your actions, your influence. Just now, in this moral crisis, what sort of doctrine comes from your pulpit? In this day of your country's trial are you preaching loyalty, economy, self-denial? Do prayers go up from your pulpit in behalf of a suffering humanity?

O my soul, look well to the light that shines from thy life. Is it true, or does it lead men astray? Is it clear, or does it direct in ways one's conscience condemns? Is its blaze steady, or dost thou suffer it to grow dim in some dark hour of temptation? Let thy pulpit flame be lighted from the lamp of His Word—it never grows dim nor leads astray.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."—
I John 5. 21.

What, do *we* need this admonition? The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone, but *we* are not idol worshipers. Are you sure? Here is a definition, "An idol is a person or thing extravagantly loved and honored; that on which the affections are inordinately set; a phantom of the brain; a misleading habit of reasoning; a fallacious tendency." In one of his books Bacon speaks of idols, and for the sake of distinctions he names four classes. First, there are "idols of the tribe"; those sins which beset us as members of the great tribe, the human family. Second, "idols of the cave"; by which he means the evil tendencies of the individual life, for each one "has a cave of his own which refracts and discolors the light of nature." Third, the "idols of the marketplace" are made up of "false opinions generated in the crowd, numberless empty controversies and idle fancies." Fourth, "idols of the theater"; by which he means the foolish philosophies of life; he calls them idols of the theater because, to his mind, they seem "mere stage plays, representing unreal worlds in unreal ways." Yes, we will listen, for we need this warning word, "Keep yourselves from idols."

Our Father, thou who art the one true and living God, we turn from our idols to thee; from our sin to thine own self; from our greed to thy goodness; from our inordinate affections to thy pure love; from our foolish theories to thy firm Word: our idols, O Christ, whatever they may be, we tear them from their throne and worship only thee.

"My grace is sufficient for thee."—2 *Corinthians*
12. 9.

Grace, defined as "God's love in action," is all sufficient. It is good to know that in a world of need there is one storehouse that cannot be emptied. Humanity, in a never-ending stream, may enter to claim its riches, but they cannot be exhausted. Besides, in what a variety of cases does divine grace meet our needs. We cannot imagine any condition of life, any experience possible for men and women, in which it fails. The climax is reached when we read that in weakness His strength is made manifest. The apostle's thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, was always present. Paul knew it was something that would never leave him; but the grace all sufficient turned the groanings into gloryings. We rest upon this promise. No, we *go ahead* upon this promise. For grace is God's love in action. Sufficient grace is not for the idlers; it is for the industrious. Robertson of Brighton had a lifelong infirmity; but here, where his greatest weakness lay, appeared his greatest strength. His biographer says of him, "He transmuted the dross of his nature into gold by the alchemy of *Christian effort*." God's love in action, which made his character crystal, is sufficient for you. "Do not pray for easy lives," says Phillips Brooks. "Pray to be stronger men and women."

I do not ask, O Lord, for an easy task. I do not want that all barriers should be broken down for me. I only pray that I may have strength in weakness; the will to do my work as thou shalt point it out to me; and that I may trust thy grace, not only in occasional emergencies, but in daily experiences.

"The people bring much more than enough for the service of the . . . sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing."—*Exodus 36. 5-6.*

More than enough—what a refreshing thought. The tabernacle filled, the temple orderly, the treasury overflowing, the people eager to serve—glad tidings indeed. So the people were not *constrained* to bring, but *restrained* from bringing. Are the Christian people of our generation so united, so enthusiastic that restraint instead of constraint is the entreaty from the pulpit? What does the Lord ask us to bring to the service of *our* sanctuary? *Worship.* "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." *Service.* "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." *Substance.* "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me herewith, saith the Lord." *Allegiance.* "He that is not for me is against me." *A good example.* "Be thou an example to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity." *Prayer.* "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands."

Saviour of men, thou who didst, without constraint, pour out thy life for us, we lift our hands to thee. We would that they might be holy hands, of worship, of service, and of prayer. To thy great gift which thou didst make for us, help us to so respond that heaven and earth shall echo with the entreaty—"Restrain, restrain, my people bring *more than enough*."

"Trust in him at all times."—*Psalm 62. 8.*

This trumpet gives forth no uncertain sound. Trust in Him at *all* times. The time or the occasion is unthinkable in which Christ is not to be trusted. Trust him in the dark and in the light, for night and day are both alike to him. Trust him on land and on sea, for God and heaven are as near the water as the land. Trust him in times of danger and in places of safety; let us not be doubtful of his power to keep us when danger surrounds, nor boastful of our power to keep ourselves when all men cry "peace and safety." Trust him in sickness and in health; let us keep the health, found in him and reflected in our countenance, and when sickness comes let us supplement medical skill with calmness and confidence in the Great Physician. Trust him in plenty and in want, in sorrow and in joy, when harvests are good and when harvests are bad, when business is brisk and when it moves with leaden feet. I will trust in him and *do my part*. He has made me gifts for use; I will use them. He has made me a partner in his blessed work; I resolve to do my share in this privileged partnership. I will do my best and leave the rest.

O Lord, failure is all about us. We have failed, and all because we have not trusted or we have trusted amiss. We have built upon the sands, we have put our faith in things that were fleeting, and now we come to thee, for thou art the sure foundation. Help us to build upon thy Word. May we have grace to say, "I follow," when thou dost say, "I lead." E'en in the valley of the shadow we will trust thee, for thou art with us. Each morning we will go out to work for thee; each evening we will come in to rest in thee. Thus day and night, trusting in thee at all times, our time will pass and mingle at last with eternity.

"And they sing the song of Moses . . . and the Lamb."—*Revelation 15. 3.*

What is the most inspiring music you ever heard? An old man wrote me a letter a few days ago; he told of being in Boston in 1869 for the great Peace Jubilee, sung in praise of the ending of the Civil War. There was a chorus of 10,000 voices, an orchestra of 1,000 pieces; 200 anvils had been placed on the platform for use in the "Anvil Chorus." There were huge bells, and outside, in the park, was artillery to be fired, by electricity, in harmony with the chorus. At the head of the 200 violins stood the world's greatest violinist, Ole Bull, who had them so trained that their bows worked as in the hand of one man. Parepa Rosa was the soloist, of whose singing that day Talmage said, "It will never again be equalled on earth." When, in the "Star Spangled Banner," she sang the high "C," with the *fortefortissimo* accompaniment of the full chorus and orchestra, the bells and cannon, it was so loud and clear that it seemed to bury that wonderful accompaniment. Nothing like it was ever heard before, and never will be again. The letter closed, "I am an old man now, but am looking forward to the music of Heaven, where there will be music infinitely superior to the marvelous chorus I listened to that day." Yes, and his voice will be heard in the song of Moses and the Lamb.

O God, if we are to have a part in the song of Heaven, must we not begin to fit ourselves on earth? How we need to keep our gaze upon thee, our Leader, yet how our eyes wander away from thee! Out of time, out of tune, the music we make is discordant sound. Help us, Master, to find the lost chord, that, here as there, we may join in the grand Amen.

"Thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."—*John 13. 7.*

We are very much like children. We cannot wait. Do we want a thing? We want it at once, no waiting. The promise of the future means little to us. Our desire must be gratified. Impatience leads to many another defect in character. We find ourselves growing irritable if things do not go just as we want them to, and that right away. Impatience destroys usefulness. The impatient man cannot stand as a tower of strength to those about him who need the shadow of a great rock. Eagerness to know things quickly never made a sincere student nor a great scholar. The desire to build things, and to build hurriedly, results in mushroom structures and institutions. God does not do things hurriedly. With him "a thousand years are as a watch in the night." God honors the man who takes him at his word, who goes right ahead, doing his work, confident that the newer day will bring the fuller knowledge. "Never think that God's delays are God's denials. Hold on; hold fast; hold out." It is good to think that what is hidden from us now will some day be revealed. O the dark sayings, the strange experiences there are in life! Could we but know! Some day, "face to face, we shall know even as also we are known." Therefore wait, in quietness and confidence, for "patience is the ballast of the soul."

Give us faith, our Saviour, to believe that the passing years will unfold to us many things we cannot now understand. May the wondrous healing qualities of time work upon our troubled souls. And while we wait, help us to work. And while we are patient, help us to persist in all good things. May we be profited by that which is withheld as truly as by that which is revealed.

"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."—
Deuteronomy 33. 25.

"Lord, for to-morrow and its needs
I do not pray;
Keep me, my God, from stain of sin
Just for to-day."

In this hymn we frequently sing we find faith at its highest point. What a simple thing it is, how readily we all admit it, yet how difficult it is to do—to live one day at a time. The late Robert J. Burdette used to say, "There are two days in the week about which I never worry, two care-free days, kept sacredly free from fear and apprehension. One of these days is *yesterday*. Yesterday, with all its cares and frets, with all its pains and aches, all its faults, its mistakes and blunders, has passed forever beyond the reach of my recall. It was mine. It is God's. The other day that I do not worry about is *to-morrow*. To-morrow, with all its possible adversities, its burdens, its perils, its large promise and poor performance, its failures and mistakes, is as far beyond the reach of mastery as its dead sister, yesterday. It is a day of God's." But *to-day* belongs to me. I can bear to-day's burden. I can conquer to-day's temptation. I can be friendly to-day. I can be strong to-day. I have work to-day. I am clothed to-day. I am fed to-day. The meaning in our Lord's prayer is very deep, "Give us *this* day our *daily* bread."

Saviour, we seek strength for this day.
Forgive us our sin of yesterday. Take
away our dread of to-morrow. Help us to
receive this gift from thy hands, this gift
of to-day, and use it as though there never
was such a day as this, for there never was,
and never again will there be.

"The Lord . . . guided them on every side."—
2 Chronicles 32. 22.

On every side—above, beneath, and round about. We are shortsighted; God is far visioned. Enemies we cannot see lurk beyond the turn in the road; God's eye is everywhere. We are watchful lest some dread disease attack the body; God guards no less vigilantly against the sicknesses of the soul. We see chance enemies in the flesh; Christ said, "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." With an adequate army and navy we imagine ourselves protected; God sees the foes within and summons us to be doubly fortified by the cleansing of the heart. God's guidance forms a triangle. The first side is *God's ability to guide*. Man has never called in question the infinite power of the Creator; he is above all, and through all, and all in all. The triangle's second side is, *man's willingness to be guided*. What rebellious souls we are, knowing right but doing evil, mindful of the good but choosing the bad, taking the soft and easy way when God would guide us to strength by the road of a hard task. The third side is, *God's method of guidance*. The voice of conscience, our better judgment, the study of his Word, finding him in the place of worship, the influence of manly and womanly Christian associates—thus is God's good guidance manifested.

God of the centuries, thou who didst give our fathers for their guidance a cloudy pillar by day and a pillar of fire by night, guide us, we pray. We crave not the outward glamour; we ask the inner evidence. Hearing the still small voice within, believing that the everlasting arms are round about, may we daily trust thy good guidance.

"Are there not twelve hours in the day?"—
John 11. 9.

Christ spoke these words. He, very Son of God, heir of all the ages, from everlasting to everlasting, with eternity at his command, hear him as he speaks of time in terms of *hours*. Yes, right here is the difficulty. "Have I not twelve hours," I boast, "time enough for all my work?" And the simple fact that I have time makes me procrastinate. "O I can do that to-morrow," I say; but for that special duty to-morrow never comes. Young man, how old are you? "Twenty-five years; I have plenty of time." Christ did not think so. When he was but a lad he said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" In the midst of his public ministry he said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is yet day; for the night cometh when no man can work." How much of his work have you done this past week? How many hours did you spend in prayer? How many hours did you give to thinking true thoughts and translating them into deeds? How many hours did you spend in satisfying self, and how many in serving Christ? It takes but a moment to speak a cruel word; the tears fall for many an hour. One hour of sin may mean a lifetime of regret. "The curfew tolls the knell of passing day." There *are* twelve hours, but *only* twelve hours.

O Christ, thou who didst wisely use the hours of thine earthly life; thou who didst come to the eleventh hour with no vain regrets—help me to redeem the time. Toward the *highest* I would *hourly* tend; in thy *service* I would daily lose *myself*.

"I have seen thee in the sanctuary."—*Psalms*
63. 2.

A man is known by the places he frequents. I have the right to judge a man by the places in which I see him. Sir, I saw you at your business the other day. That's fine. You must make a living for yourself and for your family. I saw you at the lodge last evening. Excellent. Human life is, after all, something of a fraternity. I saw you in the club reading room yesterday afternoon. Splendid. Do not let your mind go to seed. I saw you on the gymnasium floor. Good. You will live longer, you will be happier, you will do better work by keeping your body in trim. I saw you—no, I did not see you in the sanctuary last Sunday; and the Sunday before that I missed you. Where were you? What *Men Live By* is one of the best books of recent years, written by Richard C. Cabot, M.D. In thirty-four virile, fascinating chapters he tells men that the four things by which they live are "*Work, Play, Love, Worship.*" Each man can estimate for himself how much of a man he is by the attention he gives to these four things. Shall I be seen of men at my work, at my play, in my home, and refuse to give my presence to the sanctuary? Shall I stop short of the fullest development of my manhood? Am I content to be three fourths of a man? What, does one go to church to be seen of men? No. "I have seen *thee* in the sanctuary."

Lord of life, we have seen *thee* in the sanctuary; therefore with joy we regularly set our faces toward thy holy hill. We come, not as the Pharisee came, to be seen of men, but that we may see thee. Open thou our eyes that we may see. Inspire thou our hearts that we may will to seek thee in thy rightful place, the sanctuary.

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also."—2 Timothy 1. 5.

A clause in the will of the late Governor Pennypacker of Pennsylvania runs thus, "To my daughter Josephine I give and bequeath the silver dollar given me by my grandmother, which has been in my pocket wherever I have gone during the last fifty-five years." He further speaks of the coin as "the one concrete thing most closely associated with me personally." Forty-five years ago the men who worked for my grandfather gave him a gold watch. In due time it came into my possession, and its sentiment is preserved in the watch I carry to-day. Thus do we highly prize tangible things, not so much because of their value, but because of the sentiment connected therewith. Paul suggested something to Timothy, a gift that had come down to him, through his parents, from his grandparents. "*The faith that is in thee,*" is more precious than any concrete heirlooms. I but dimly remember my grandfather (he died when I was a small boy), but I remember enough to know that the faith I have to-day is largely the faith he gave to my father.

God of our fathers, to thee we look.
Thou didst dwell with them; thou art still
with us. For the faith that was in them
we praise thee. It did not fail them; it
will ever be our stay and strength. For
the things they left us, that we can see
and handle, we are grateful. But our
confidence is in the *faith* that led them
safely through and will bring us some day
to see them face to face.

"The foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines."
—*Song of Solomon 2. 15.*

For seven years my home was in the vineyard country. Is there any sight more beautiful than a well cultivated vineyard? The vines are planted a certain distance apart, in straight lines. Like soldiers drawn up for review, rank upon rank, regiment after regiment, the long rows of grapes for miles guard the country highway. I know what it means to be a vineyard keeper; scores of those men I counted my friends. I walked with them across their fields; they talked with me of their difficulties. Always it was the *little foxes* they were combating. A terrific storm would sweep the country, a late frost would come, but the vineyard would survive these. It was the tiny insect, the hidden worm, the deadly blight—these little foxes were the spoilers of the vines. It is so in character. Who is ever tempted to commit the great sin that with one fell swoop would destroy him body and soul? The little sins are our chief enemies; they are most difficult to combat. Little sins *grow*. Insignificant to-day; to-morrow they have the strength of a giant. Little sins *multiply*. The one lie becomes many; the one drink becomes a dozen; the one neglect is soon a habit. Like the giant of old, prostrated by the dwarfs, we are bound by the threads of our little sins.

Thou, Lord, who didst never despise the day of small things, may I not underestimate the power of the little sins. Help me not to be boastful, saying, "I can stop any time," for by that very confession the thread becomes a rope. While yet I am master of myself I choose the unfettered way. In thy path, O Christ, is fullness of liberty, and at thy right hand are pleasures without a sting.

"Moses wist not that...his face shone."—*Exodus 34. 29.*

"Samson...wist not that the Lord was departed from him."—*Judges 16. 20.*

Each of these men wist not that he was what he was. The one reflected in his countenance the glory of a lofty experience. The other showed the depths to which he had sunk. Both were unconscious of their condition. Unconscious goodness is the most attractive. Real righteousness is not advertised, does not parade itself; it shines as the light, with quiet, pure rays; it is unaware of its far-reaching beneficence. I know a man whose work for God is felt in every country under the sun. The reason men not only heed his word, but honor and love him, is that his goodness streams from him as an effortless, at least unconscious, ray of light. It is equally true that the most repulsive recreancy is found in the man who will not own that his strength has departed from him. I had a young friend for whom I predicted a life of unusual usefulness in the work of the Kingdom. His strength was as the strength of ten of his companions, he was so gifted. Years passed ere I looked into his face again. He had changed. He was not the young man I had known. His strength was gone. The pathetic thing was that he thought he was as spiritually true and morally keen as ever; he wist not that the Lord had departed from him.

Thou, Master, who art able to save from the uttermost to the uttermost; thou who wilt hold from falling those who place themselves in thy keeping; thou who dost dwell with men, whose Spirit shines, unaware, through the faces of those who give themselves to thee—I ask that thou wilt lead me to the heights, that thou wilt cause my life to shine with an unconscious goodness. Above all I pray that I may be saved from falling into the depths, shorn of my power, yet boastful that I possess it.

"I am among you as he that serveth."—*Luke 22. 27.*

To serve means to save; to save one's own self, of course, but others as well. He dwarfs his own soul who says, "I am among you as one making money, seeking pleasure, following my fancies." Temptations are overcome in the life of the one who says, "I am among you as one that serveth," and joy is his. Much energy has been wasted and many foolish things have been done trying to make it easy for people to come into the church, and so pleasant for them after they are in that they will not become displeased. Self-content is the result not of self-ease but of self-dedication. Dan Crawford spent twenty-two years without a break in the long grass of Central Africa. A few years ago he emerged and gave to the world an enduring book, *Thinking Black*. Then he plunged back into obscurity. But Konga Vantu (his African name) could not hide himself. He is before the eyes of the world. His life of service has made a radiant pathway to his wilderness home. Apply the phrase—*Thinking Self or Thinking Service*. "I am convinced," said a young man to me, "that one's salvation, one's triumph in character, depends upon finding something to do, some fields of service outside of one's required work."

My soul, too much hast thou pleased thyself and served too little. Thou hast been filled with ease and empty of enduring things. Thou hast sought thine own ecstasy and refused to extend thy borders. Thou hast harped upon pleasure and hope to avoid poverty thereby, but thou art emaciated; I hardly recognize thee as my soul. Rouse thyself, deny thyself, give thyself, answer thou the roll-call to which the Son of God eagerly responded; say with him, "I am among you as he that serveth."

"Day unto day uttereth speech."—*Psalm 19. 2.*

So the days have the gift of speech. "Speech is the impassable barrier that exists shutting the beast from man." But here is something that challenges man in his power of speech—the days have this inestimable gift. What does the Sabbath day speak to you? Is it simply the end of another week, a day upon which you stay away from the office, the store or the shop? Is it a day given over entirely to the automobile, the carriage, the pleasure excursion, the games, or does the Sabbath day lift up its voice and speak to you saying, "This is the day which the Lord hath made, remember it, to rest in it and keep it holy"? What do Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and the days of the week speak to you? Do they say, "Another day of toil and drudgery, I'm weary of it all," or does the rising sun of each week day utter this voice: "Here's another day of blessed task, a day of privilege, a day in which I may earn my living, a day through which I may work shoulder to shoulder with my fellow man and strengthen him for the better things of life"?

Father in Heaven, thou who didst create the days and give them light, thou who didst lead us to know the light of day, thou who hast given us days upon days we have never deserved, forgive us for having wasted so many of them, for having in the acts of those days denied thee again and again. Help us that each day may be a new day, a day whose voice shall speak strength, sympathy, manliness, womanliness, Christ-likeness.

"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."—*Revelation 3. 11.*

A thing worth *having* is worth *holding*. The best possessions are not gripped by the hand, they are held in the heart. Faith, hope, love, confidence in Christ, loyalty to his church, the conquest of wrong—these are the things worth having and holding. They are not to be left behind when we journey afar, they are to be taken with us. A young man who was going to a great city to make his way in the world fell in with an old sea captain who asked him if he had letters of introduction. "Certainly," said the young man, producing them. "Have you a church certificate?" asked the captain. "O yes, but I did not suppose you desired to see that." "Yes," said the sea captain, "I want to see that. As soon as you reach the city hunt up your church and present that. I am an old sailor, and have been up and down in the world; and it is my rule, as soon as I get into port, to fasten my ship fore and aft to the wharf, although it may cost a little wharfage, rather than have my ship out in the stream, floating hither and thither with the tide." We are sailors and travelers. We drop anchor in many a port, we tarry in many a city. To hold that fast which we have is difficult but it is needful, that no man take our crown.

We are thankful, O Lord, for the great possession of Christian character, for a redeemed manhood and womanhood. Help us to hold fast our heritage. As thou hast given us the crown may we have strength and determination to keep it.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."
—*Isaiah 55. 7.*

Forsaking. "Let the wicked forsake his way." The Christian life begins at this point; the old ways must be forsaken, new paths must be sought. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." The military term, "Right about, face," must be applied to the moral realm.

Forgetting. "The unrighteous man his thoughts." The penetrating power of the work of grace is very great. We must get out of the habit of evil thinking. The sinful *deed* begins with the sinful *thought*. Yes, we must let Christ control our thoughts. "Forgetting those things which are behind," said Paul. He did not mean that the past was blotted out, rather he meant that evil thinking was a thing of the past.

Returning. "Let him return unto the Lord." The impulse of the heart must be translated into action. "I will arise and go to my father," said the young man. All the distance he had wandered away from home, with weary but glad steps he *returned*. And having of his own will returned he was—

Received. "For he will abundantly pardon." This is the promise divine—"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." The Father's arms are ever open to receive those who will return.

Heavenly Father, we would be *wholly* thine, body, mind, and spirit. Help us to forsake every wicked way. May we put out of our minds the evil thinking with which we have so often benumbed our moral and spiritual sensibilities. We *re-*
turn to thee, the *royal* way of *complete* consecration. Do thou *receive* us and use us in thy service.

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer."—*Acts 3. 1.*

From *Pentecost to prayer*. From the mountain-top experience that thrilled their souls to the quiet act of worship. In that wonderful hour the Holy Spirit had been given them, but that did not supply the need of customary prayer. God gives to his people now and then *Pentecostal* experiences; at the same time we need to be *persistent* in our ordinary religious duties. Do you imagine that you can get along without prayer? Peter and John had no such idea. Immediately following the most extraordinary experience of their lives they turned quietly to the house of God. They went up *together* to the temple. Do not go alone to the house of God. Take some one with you. Go a little early if necessary, step out of your ordinary course that you may be *accompanied* upon your errand of worship. Peter and John had been *partners* in the fishing trade; they now become associated in the act of *prayer*. The business of the street and the water front is carried on more smoothly because of fellowship in worship. To go *down* to the office or shop or store at the hour of toil marks one a faithful partner in the business at which he *makes a living*. To go *up* to the temple at the hour of prayer opens to us the divine partnership, showing men that we are striving also to *make a life*.

O God, we thank thee for all the blessed associations of our days. We praise thee for *loved ones* in the *home*, for *friends* in the *social circle*, for *partners* in *business*, for *companions* along the *highway*. Likewise we are grateful for *fellowship* in *prayer*. We rejoice that worship is an act of the *people*, assembling themselves together. In *prayer* and in *practice* may we be found among those who cordially say Amen.

"The weapons of our warfare are not material, but mighty through God to the tearing down of strongholds."—*2 Corinthians 10. 4.*

The Christian life is a warfare. Christ taught this. Our fond idea, that the church is a place of refuge and that Christianity is a propaganda of peace, is all wrong. "I came not to send peace but a sword," said Christ. Never did he meet evil without smiting it in the face. I have heard the phrase, "meddlesome missionaries." It is really a compliment. David Livingstone "meddled" with the slave trade of Africa. John G. Paton "meddled" with the cannibalism of the Hebrides. William Carey "meddled" with the ignorance of India. Robert Morrison "meddled" with the backwardness of China. Wilfred Grenfell is "meddling" with the unlivableness of Labrador. In the highest sense every Christian ought to be a "meddler." I have a friend who is a foremost Christian in one of our great American cities. A few weeks since he wrote, "In our city are thugs and highwaymen. I am sometimes out late at night, and have to walk through poorly lighted streets. I generally carry a cane—for I am a militant Quaker." He is a Quaker; I remember when he wore his hair long, touching his collar; he is preeminently a man of peace, but it is a joy to see him blaze forth with righteous indignation whenever evil of any sort raises its ugly head in his pathway.

Thou art, O Christ, the Captain of our salvation. Help us in our warfare. Give us victory in the battle that we have with ourselves—our own besetting sins. Strengthen us in the warfare with evil round about; may we stand above it and conquer.

“I girded thee, though thou hast not known me.”—*Isaiah 45. 5.*

My friend, is this true of your life? God has given you sight, yet you have not seen him. He has given hearing, yet you have not heard his voice. He has given you speech, yet you have not spoken his praise. He has given you strength, yet you have not served him. He has given you friends, yet you have not entered into the friendship which sanctifies all others, the friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has given you godly parents, a goodly heritage, a great nation, yet you have not acknowledged the “giver of every good and perfect gift.” Even in the harsh experiences God has been with you, blessing you and working his will. The novelist, George Macdonald, put into the mouth of one of his characters who had been buffeted by severe experiences and in rebellion was complaining to a friend of the hardness of her life, these words—“O I would to God I had never been made.” The friend quietly replied, “Why, my child, you are not yet made; you are just being made, and here you are quarreling with God’s processes.” God was girding her, day by day. He was with her, refining her character, fitting her for usefulness. My friend, could the voice divine speak to you this tender but sad condemnation—“I have girded thee though thou hast not known me”?

Lord, this Thanksgiving month we pray that we may have the spirit of thankfulness. May we not be numbered among those thankless children whose ingratitude is "sharper than a serpent's tooth." Through good report and through ill thou hast been with us. Thou hast "covered our head." Therefore we covenant with thee that this may be said—"*I have girded thee and thou hast known me.*"

"And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them."—*Matthew 2. 9.*

The wise men were *star-led*. Nothing less than a star could have guided them. The wise men were astrologers. Their study of the stars was doubtless tainted with ignorance and superstition, yet to the representatives of this imperfect system the star of Christ came. The star stood then for the highest and best in life; so it stands to-day. The life that is star-led is the life that interprets God to the world, that comes finally to the Christ. What is it that is leading our lives? Are we star-led? Are we coming step by step, though it be through imperfect reasoning at times, to Christ? This is the world's need. The problem of life is not the problem of wealth, nor of society, nor of knowledge—it is the problem of consecration. The great ideal is to get wealth, society and knowledge consecrated, dedicated to a high and holy purpose, to get them star-led. O the power of wealth that is star-led! O the influence of a society that is star-controlled! O the depth and height of a knowledge that is star-guided!

Our Master and our Lord, whose life is the purest, whose light is the clearest, we look to thee this holy season. Have we walked in darkness? Forgive us, we pray. We turn to the light. We set our faces toward the star. May that star, which has brought light to the ages, bring joy to our hearts.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."
—*Proverbs 29. 18.*

Vision. This word may have a physical meaning. There is such a thing as a vision of physical health. Theodore Roosevelt, by no means a sturdy youth, caught the vision and achieved bodily strength and athletic prowess. Or vision may mean always looking on the bright side of things. To wear the dark cloud inside out is to have vision. Vision may also mean a plan or a program. A successful farmer said to me, "I try each year to do better than I did the year before; to grow a better and larger crop." He had vision. But we must go deeper yet if we would understand the real meaning of the word vision. It means a divine revelation. Vision is something that rises before us, ungraspable but not impractical; intangible but not unreal. It is something that draws out the best in us, and draws us on, always on and always up. Jesus, for the vision that was before him, endured the cross, despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Paul, lured by a vision, forgot the past and pressed on toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. We need vision; that sordid plans may give way to loving service; that darkness and doubt may flee before a full-orbed faith; that death, here and there, may be crowned with life.

Gracious Father, who hast permitted us to live in these great times, grant us strength adequate to the tasks of the new day. May the vision be bright before us; may we not fail to follow. Give the nations of the earth confidence in the world's Saviour.

"A little child shall lead them."—*Isaiah* *II. 6.*

Christmas belongs to the children. At this season presidents, legislators, judges, generals, step out of the limelight, and the children march in. "Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth," wrote Charles Dickens. We are all glad to be children at Christmas time. What strange thing has power to subtract the years and for a day make us children the world 'round? No strange thing, but the central truth of history. Christmas acknowledges the leadership of the Child. The entire verse reads, "The wolf . . . shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." The prophet gives us a picture, figurative it may be, but not wholly so, of redeemed nature. I am convinced that the picture will be a reality, that order will come out of chaos, that hatred will give way to love, that men will "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks," only by the leadership of the child—your child, and my child, the child of America, Asia, Africa, Europe—all led by the Child whose birthday the world keeps, who came as God's gift of love to men, and who alone is able to lead us back to the Father's yearning heart.

We thank thee, our Father, that thou hast set the children in our midst. For their sakes do we build four walls and a roof, and set the table. For their good do we cheerfully maintain schools and churches, cities and streets. For their joy do we sacrifice and strain. For their prosperity do we plan and pray. But lo, they are leading us, and in their van is the Child, now our Lord and Saviour, but once a child. Save us, and save the world's childhood, in His name, we pray.

"I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday."—*Psalm 42. 4.*

The multitude kept *holyday*, not *holiday*. A holiday was originally a holyday. How incongruous is the keeping of most of our holydays. Have the days degenerated or are the people to blame? By heroic effort, by a nation-wide campaign we succeeded in rescuing the Fourth of July from an insane celebration. The next and most needed reform is the rescue of Christmas. "Only twelve more shopping days until Christmas." And so we commercialize the holiest day on the calendar. "I am at my wits' end; what can I get Jane and John, uncle, aunt, cousin, friends?" And the season which ought to be given over to gladness and praise becomes a time of fuss and worry. "What new thing can I do to *celebrate* Christmas?" is the question we ask; seldom, "How can I best *consecrate* the day?" *Christmas belongs to Christ*. It is his birthday. Alas, we have made more of the *day*, than we have of the *deed* it commemorates. "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." An angel stood by. The glory of the Lord shone round about. The heavenly host sang. The shepherds searched out the manger-cradle. The wise men worshiped. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh they gave, not to one another, not to Cæsar, but to Christ.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Remembering our friends, we would not forget thee. Lavishing gifts upon others, we would not let the season pass without a recognition of the love thou hast shown us. Making the day happy, we would not neglect to make it helpful and holy. Though there is strife in the world, we would be at peace with thee. We number ourselves among the multitude, that with the voice of joy and praise, keep Christmas a *holyday*.

"And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."—*Matthew 2. 12.*

The wise men returned home *another* way. They could not go back the way they had come; they had seen something that changed their path of life. *Another* way—this is the only possible afterpath of the right keeping of Christmas. If we have caught the real Christmas message our life cannot be the same that it was before. Our thoughts will be higher, our vision clearer, our hands cleaner, our life more open, our spirit more generous. Dickens, in his Christmas Carol, tells of Scrooge, crabbed, selfish, shut-within-himself old fellow. He hated Christmas, he hated the poor, he hated children, he hated everything that had any suggestion of Christmas. One Christmas Eve he had a dream of the horrid man he really was; he loathed himself, he longed to be back in the world, he prayed for just one more Christmas day that he might keep it aright. He awoke with a start, he realized that he had been dreaming. He leaped out of bed, dressed in haste, ran out upon the street, almost like a mad man, crying to everyone he met, "Merry Christmas." Such a day did he have! Such a life did he live thereafter, it was never again the same. He had caught the spirit of Christmas. He returned *another* way, he lived a *different* life.

Father above, we step out into the after-path of this Christmas. We pray that it may be a *new* path, *another* way, a *better* life for us. We would follow in the wake of the wise men. As they found it impossible to return to the companionship of the sinful Herod, may we find the evil way impossible, the holy, helpful way inviting. May Immanuel lead us all this year.

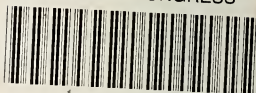
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